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ABSTRACT

Illinois does not currently have a statewide certification program for adult educators, although the Illinois Adult and Continuing Educators Association has adopted a set of professional standards for adult educators. Some local school districts in the state do, however, require that adult educators be certified. The issue of whether to require such certification on a statewide basis is controversial. Some individuals contend that certification is an economic issue, with districts often choosing to employ noncertified teachers part time in order to escape the additional costs associated with providing fringe benefits to full-time teachers. Although some question whether certification of adult educators, be it voluntary or mandatory, would benefit the field, others feel that it would, while acknowledging that certification is only as good as those doing the certifying. At least one researcher has written that without certification there would be a much greater opportunity to learn and teach as one chooses. Another researcher has raised a number of issues that must be investigated further before any decision concerning formulation of a certification policy is made. Included among these are whether additional full-time positions would be established in the state for certified adult educators, what resources would be needed to establish certification in some form for adult educators in the state, and the extent to which administrators hire or retain teachers with specialized training and experience or with training or experience in continuing and adult education. (MN)

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CERTIFICATION OF ADULT EDUCATION TEACHERS

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CERTIFICATION OF ADULT EDUCATION TEACHERS

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The Illinois Adult Education Program operates under the provisions of the State Adult Education Act (P.A. 82-998) and Section 10-22.20 of the Illinois School Code of Illinois. It is also guided by the Federal Adult Education Act (P.L. 91-230).

Adult education programs funded through the Illinois State Board of Education provide adults with instruction in the following areas: adult basic education (ABE) comparable to elementary grades, adult secondary education (ASE) including the General Educational Development (GED) Test (a nationally recognized test for a Certificate of High School Equivalency), and entry-level employment skills in addition to skills needed to become a functional and contributing member of society.

Since it began in 1942, the American Council on Education's GED testing program has enabled more than 10 million adults to earn high school equivalency credentials. Because of significant growth in the last two decades, the program now tests about 700,000 persons and results in about 450,000 credentials each year--about 14 percent of all the high school diplomas in the United States annually. To keep pace with changes in state high school graduation requirements, the GED tests will be revised for 1988. Of the many changes to be made at that time, the most visible will be the addition of a direct writing assessment (essay) to the Writing Skills test battery. In addition, continuing a trend begun in 1978, the tests will contain more questions measuring examinees' higher level thinking skills--and fewer questions which require lower level thinking skills. In addition, the tests will increase slightly the emphasis placed on algebra, include aspects of global history and politics, and

add emphasis on science as seen in the world around us. Too, for the first time, the revised tests will require that examinees read and interpret commentary about literature and the arts (Whitney, 1986). Adult education programs will continue to evolve and expand and there are more major changes over coming years. One issue is the certification of adult educators.

Certification is defined by Cervero (1985) as a process of legal sanctioning that authorizes the holder of a credential to perform specific services in adult education. To explore the issue of certification of adult education teachers and to devise plans of action, it is essential to assess the current situation (Bright, 1985).

A few states have established certification for adult education (Bright, 1985). Currently, certification in adult education is required of some teachers in four and all teachers in eight other states including Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Missouri, Mississippi, New Mexico, New York, and Rhode Island (Cervero, 1985). Yet Terdy (1985) contends that even though standards, coursework, and guidelines have been proposed at the national and state levels, many go unrecognized.

There exists no statewide certification program in Illinois, albeit Cervero (1985) contends that the Illinois Adult and Continuing Educators Association (IACEA) has adopted a set of professional standards for adult educators. But for some local school districts, these standards are not enough and Bright (1985) reported that some Illinois adult education programs in certain school districts require their instructors to be certified. But

Shaw (1985) contends that certification is an economic issue. He states that although part-time work and certification might seem at first glance to be two separate issues, in actual fact there is an economic cause-effect relationship between them. He reported in one recent year that 2,969 teachers of adults were employed in the Chicago area, but only eighty-nine were full-time: the other 2,880 were part-time adult educators. Because there is no Illinois credential for adult educators, program administrators have a large labor pool from which to hire. Because of this large pool and the general scarity of jobs in education, adult education programs usually have no trouble finding more than enough willing participants for every teaching position. In order to save money for their institutions (and thus protect their own jobs) many administrators hire two or three applicants and employ them part-time to cover one full-time schedule of teaching. This saves money since part-timers seldom qualify for paid holidays, vacations, or insurance and they can be laid off on very short notice (Shaw, 1985). Bright (1985) admits that several adult education programs that employ only certified teachers provide full-time positions for those adult educators.

Scheffner (1985) questions whether certification of adult educators, either on a mandatory or voluntary basis, would benefit the field. Reynolds (1985) believes it would. He believes that standards should be met and that these standards would guide local programs in the selection of staff. But Scheffner (1985) contends that the field of adult education is too diverse

to benefit from certification. An asset of adult education is that it is able to provide many programs of many types, taught in many ways. The field would lose its diversity which has always been a source of strength. Scheffner (1985) also states that if a need is pressing and imminent, and people are present who have the knowledge to minister to that need through education, whether or not they are certified is of no importance. Certification does not guarantee competence. Many certified personnel in other fields bear witness to that fact. But Reynolds (1985) still contends that standards (even though he agrees with Scheffner in that certification does not ensure competence) should be implemented. These standards would establish criteria by which a person must be judged. These standards should range from what is minimally required to those traits that are commonly identified with a master teacher.

Cervero (1982), questions certification concepts and their impact on adult educators:

1. Can we discuss the values, functions, and philosophies of the field without forcing one set on everyone?

2. Can we seek to improve our competencies and performance without making learners subordinate actors in the educational process?

3. Can we seek collective identity without excluding otherwise competent people through some meaningless credentialing process?

But Reynolds (1985) contends that the certification of adult educators is not meaningless. The certification is only as good as those doing it and that the merits or validity of these criteria (certification) are, at best, subjective and have a ten-

dency to become archaic if they are not constantly reviewed in terms of the needs of the individual.

But what about the needs of the adult student. Jones (1981) reports that despite basic similarities in the manners in which adults and children process information, there are certain practical considerations pertaining to the teaching of illiterate adults which do not apply to children in the same degree. These relate to physiological differences, time constraints, previous experiences, language differences, motivation, and learning expectations. Questions have arisen as to whether certification would ensure effective teaching techniques and Bright (1985) poses this question in his analysis:

> What benefits would a program derive from certification requirements insofar as quality of instruction of adults is concerned?

But Scheffner (1985) contends that certification would hamper teacher and learner effectiveness. She states that certification would restrict a form of education-of learning-that can reach those who were not able to learn in traditional ways, and those who don't choose to learn in such ways. Without certification, there would be much greater opportunity to learn and to teach as one chooses. Scheffner (1985) sees the issues as:

1. A unique core of knowledge is difficult to establish. Therefore, development of a certifying instrument or a set of criteria would be virtually impossible to develop.
2. Specific skills on which to certify would be difficult to determine.
3. There would be a decrease in numbers of adult educators, for not all would meet certification requirements.
4. Expected competencies differ from program to program.

Bright (1985), while taking a relatively neutral position, raised additional issues to examine:

1. Would additional full-time positions be established for certified adult educators?

2. Mechanisms for K-12 certification in particular disciplines have long been established in Illinois. What steps would be necessary to extend certification in those disciplines (e.g., reading) to the adult level? Would this be a more likely way to obtain certification for teachers of adults?

3. A few states have established certification for adult education. In those states, is adult education certification supplementary to K-12 certification or is it a separate credentialing mechanism?

4. Newly created certification specializations within Illinois schools, such as school nurse, were established through legislative means rather than through action internal to the Illinois State Board of Education's Certification Section. What resources, including lobbying efforts, would be needed in order to establish certification in some form for adult educators in Illinois?

5. To what extent do administrators hire or retain teachers with specialized training and experience? To what extent do they hire or retain teachers who have studied adult/continuing education?

The reviewed literature reveals many different attitudes and ideas regarding the certification of adult educators. The body of available research indicated that favorable, unfavorable, and neutral positions exist and that the general findings were inconclusive. These inconclusive findings appear to be a legitimate concern and are the questions for study.

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